## LVFNC BIRD SURVEY OF APM MARYVALE WETLANDS

On Tuesday 7th February a large group of bird watchers from LVFNC visited the APM Maryvale Wetlands. The day was mostly fine, although much cooler than usual for February. We got one light shower of rain, but it was rather windy and that affected the bird watching, especially our ability to locate the smaller bush birds.

As we approached the wetlands our first bird was a Swamp Harrier, one of many we saw in the day and they were the commonest raptor, but we did also find Whistling Kites, one Wedgetail Eagle and just as we were departing, an adult White-breasted Sea-eagle flew right overhead.

Darters were quite numerous, and the three commonest cormorants were all present. Great Cormorants and Little Black Cormorant were quite numerous, but it took a while before we found a Little Pied Cormorant.

Duck were numerous and varied, although mainly concentrated in the shallow northern corner of the wetlands. There were a few Black Swans, Black Duck were everywhere, but the best find among the duck was a small group of Pink-eared Duck. We also saw Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Australian Shelduck, Wood Duck and Hardhead.

There were several sightings of Australian Little Grebe, including juveniles and a few Hoary-headed Grebe were among the large rafts of duck.

A group of white birds in the distance caused a lot of speculation. They were misidentified by one group as Cattle Egrets and by me as White Ibis. When we finally got close to them they proved to be 7 Royal Spoonbills, 2 Great Egrets and a couple of Little Black Cormorants. At least 2 Yellow-billed Spoonbills were also seen. There were also a few White-faced Herons around and a walk along the river (which I missed out on) found a Nankeen Night Heron, one of the finds of the day.

Another very special bird was also found by the river. An Azure Kingfisher was spotted perched on a dead tree in the river. We all got a good look, before it flew, we then saw it plunge in the river and my (rather distant) photo shows that it has a small fish in its beak. As it flew back and forth, we spotted a second Azure Kingfisher, and later, when I was sitting by the river, two more flew past me, so there may be at least 4 Azure Kingfishers in that stretch of the river.

Among the smaller birds, the best finds were several possibly juvenile Mistletoe Birds just as we entered the wetlands, and a single Little Grassbird, which I got an excellent view of half way across the causeway.

Altogether some 48 different species of birds were found during the day.

We thank APM for allowing us this opportunity to explore what is an excellent area of bird habitat.

Ken Harris

## FOBB WILDFLOWER WALK AT MT BAW BAW JANUARY 2012

The temperature was a bracing 5°C as about 60 participants arrived at Baw Baw village on Saturday 14 January for the traditional Friends of Baw Baw summer wildflower walk. A pleasant mild, sunny day developed, though, as the mist cleared from the plateau.

Head ranger Andy Gillham welcomed everyone, introducing FOBB President Eileen Laidlaw and other committee members, Parks Victoria staff and excursion leaders botanist John Davies, over from Hobart for the event, and ecologist Dr Greg Hollis. The plan for the day was for a leisurely ramble around the signposted 6 km Village Trail, with some folk extending the walk by taking the Summit Trail extension. Alix Williams led a small group on the Beech Trail for those opting for a gentler alternative.

At the first stop, on the edge of the resort area, John contrasted the vegetation of the open grassy areas, including the abundantly

flowering herbs Silver Daisy *Celmisia asteliifolia* and Alpine Podolepis *P. robusta*, with that of the adjacent shrubland with its overstorey of a localised sub-species of Snow Gum *Eucalyptus pauciflora.* He noted the highly acidic peaty soils of the area, with pH levels as low as the 2-3 range. John commented on the affinity of the Baw Baw plateau flora with that of Tasmania, observing that temperatures in the depressions on the plateau fall as low as -15˚C. Greg mentioned the disappearance of the Baw Baw Frog in the sub-alpine zone; it is now found in this vicinity only at lower altitudes.

The Village Trail took us gently uphill through Snow Gum woodland, the path bordered by a myriad Grass Trigger Plants in flower, as was to be the case all day. Some of the understorey plants to which John drew our attention included Candle Heath *Richea continentis*, Alpine Orites *O. lancifolia*, Baw Baw Pepper *Tasmannia vickeriana*, Baw Baw Berry *Wittsteinia vacciniacea* growing at the base of a Snow Gum, Dusty Daisy-bush *Olearia phlogopappa* and Broom Heath *Monotoca oreophila*.

Greg explained that Leadbeaters Possum has recently been found in the unburnt Baw Baw Snow Gum forests (as well as in the lower ash forests), living in the low stumps of the eucalypts and safe at these altitudes from predatory owls.

A little further on, in a damp area, we found a Pretty Grass Flag *Libertia pulchella*, in flower. Other sightings near here included Mountain Clubmoss *Lycopodium fastigiatum*, the first of much flowering Alpine Mint-bush *Prostanthera cuneata*, Mountain Plum Pine *Podocarpus lawrencei* and Alpine Baeckea *B. gunniana.*

When we reached an extensive Sphagnum Bog area, we found the damp-tolerant Veined Sun-orchid *Thelymitra cyanea* in bud and the insectivorous Alpine Sundew *Drosera arcturi*. We spotted the small brown Common Froglet, an opportunity for Greg to explain that this species is resilient to the fungus which has decimated the population of the larger Baw Baw Frog.

Heading on, plant sightings included Alpine Leek Orchid *Prasophyllum tadgellianum* in flower and another Olearia, Alpine Daisy-bush *O. algida*, with its small sessile leaves. The flowers of a thick cluster of Veined Sun-orchids were more open in the by now brighter sunshine.

We enjoyed a leisurely lunch at the edge of Baragwanath Flat, entertained by the antics of a flock of White-eared Honeyeaters. Some of the party then climbed to the summit of Mt Baw Baw, where there is a rather grand stone cairn which was apparently constructed when this point was mistakenly thought to be the highest point on the plateau. Lots of copper-coloured skinks cautiously emerged from gaps between the stones, obviously enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun.

Descending back to the resort, we thanked Andy and the leaders for a really pleasant day at a site not visited for some years in this annual activity.

Philip Rayment

*Some of the group before the walk. Photo P Rayment*

## FALLS CREEK SUMMER CAMP 2012

### Friday 20th – Monday 23rd January

This year our club travelled further afield than usual, to Falls Creek. The last time we had visited these high plains was in 1992 when we were based at Anglers Rest and had driven up from there on day trips.

Our accommodation at the Schuss Ski Lodge was spacious and comfortable, with all amenities and an attractive outlook. Members commented that it may be hard to go back to more basic accommodation in future. Staying in Falls Creek meant we only had short drives each day for our excursions with so many walking tracks and interesting sites close by. And to top it off we had glorious sunny mild weather, so it really was an excellent summer camp experience. Thirty members and friends attended,

making record numbers, I think.

**On Saturday morning** we drove the short distance across the Rocky Valley dam wall to the car park at the start of the Ropers Lookout track, a 5 km return walk. The track runs beside an aqueduct for quite a way before climbing up to the lookout on a basalt knoll. The keen botanists didn't make it to the rise as there were so many alpine plants to identify – a lot of memory jogging was needed. At the start there were masses of Spreading Rope-rush, *Empodisma minus* and the damp areas beside the aqueduct were covered in sphagnum moss. A number of Veined Sun-orchids *Thelymitra cyanea* were found. They were a very pretty blue with darker blue veins.

The overriding flower colour for the weekend was yellow, but most of the yellow flowers were the introduced Cat's-ear, *Hypochoeris radicata.* There were thousands of them everywhere we went. There was also a lot of white yarrow along the path which had probably spread from gardens in the village. Many other yellow flowers were alpine daisies – bracteantha, ozothamnus, craspedia, helichrysum, leptorhyncus and senecio. Sorting out which genus the flowers belonged to was hard enough let alone the species. An evening spent with our botany books made it much easier on Sunday to put names to the daisies.

The two daisy-bushes we saw a lot of were *Olearia frostii*, the Bogong Daisy-bush which had largish flowers on thick long stems varying from pale purple through to white and *Olearia phlogopappa*, the Dusty Daisy-bush which had finer white flowers in bunches. The celmisias or Snow Daisies stood out with their tall large white flowers and silver coated dark green leaves. They have been split into five species, four of which would be in the Falls Creek area and we certainly noticed a variation in the leaf sizes. After much work at our botany group we decided we had seen three species over the weekend. *Celmisia tomentella*, the Bog Celmisia (often found in sphagnum bogs) had the largest leaves and flowers up to 60 cm high. It was the only Celmisia we saw in flower and was common and widespread. The other two species had flowered earlier and had much smaller narrower leaves. They were *C. costiniana*, the Herbfield Celmisia and *C. pugioniformis*, the Dagger-leaf Celmisia which had even narrower and shorter leaves than *C. costiniana*.

*Kunzea muelleri*, Yellow Kunzea, a prostrate shrub was common and had many lemon coloured flowers. Another prostrate shrub Ken Harris identified was the Tree Violet *Hymenanthera dentata*. It was always found hugging the rocks and invariably had dead tips to its branches looking as if it had a hard life. The 'Flora' notes it as a 'variant warranting taxanomic recognition' – another new species to learn in the future?

There were carpets of a thick-leaved buttercup which we decided was *Ranunculus victoriensis. Scaevola hookeri*, the Alpine Fan-flower was very pretty with its purple-blue flowers. The bluebells we found we decided were the Waxy bluebell, *Wahlenbergia ceracea*. Much paler than the Royal bluebell we saw later, and described as common in damp alpine grasslands. The Twin-flowered Knawel *Scleranthus biflorus* stood out as a light green cushion amongst the herbs and grasses, and when you get down to look closely you can see the pairs of tiny flowers standing above the cushion on little stalks. We squibbed out on trying to identify the grasses, but the many poas in flower were really pretty waving in the breeze.

As the rest of the group returned from Ropers Lookout they mocked the botanists who were inching their way along the track, and told us of the glorious views to be had from the top. Maybe I'll get to see that next trip.

Wendy Savage

**On Sunday morning** the group set off from the car park on the Bogong High Plains Road up the gentle climb of the Heathy Spur Track. The sun was bright and the air cool. Those intending to walk to Heathy Spur or the 9 km to the Watchbed Creek car park strode ahead of those who chose to 'botanise' their way along. The narrow track meandered through open grasslands and patches of low shrubs, brightened by a generous scattering of yellow and white daisies. Views of the Rocky Valley dam below, and the surrounding mountain tops, were broken by the bare silver branches of clumps of Snow Gums. New growth, regeneration from the fire of 2003, billowed one or two metres high from the lignotubers of the gums.

Grasses clothed more than half the expanse of hillside and among the grasses, between scattered clumps of shrubs such as Alpine Bossiaea and Alpine Orites, we found an extremely rich variety of plants. Shrubs and herbs in bloom included bright yellow and gold members of the daisy family: clumps of the Alpine Yam Daisy, Alpine Podolepis, Orange Everlasting, Billy-buttons, Wiry Buttons and scattered plants of Variable Groundsel, Cat's-ear (not as common as at some other sites), and the less conspicuous Silver Groundsel and Mountain Cotula. Victorian Buttercups, Ivy-leaf Goodenia, Yellow Kunzea and the tiny Twin-flowered Knawel added to the yellow theme. The predominantly white members of the daisy family created a spectacular display in places: clumps of Snow Daisies, *Celmisia tomentella*, and shrubs of Bogong Daisy-bush, Dusty Daisy-bush and Cascade Everlasting. The suite of white flowers was supported by the Prickly Starwort, Alpine Mint-bush, Derwent Speedwell, *Pimelea ligustrina*, Alpine Trachymene and Candle Heath, *Richea continentis*. A few mauves and blues were added to the yellow and white theme by Brachyscomes, the Showy Violet, *Viola betonicifolia*, Alpine Fan-flower, Willowherbs, and Waxy Bluebells. Mountain Pepper, Alpine Woodruff, Bidgee-widgee, Australian Carraway, Cranesbill, Forest Phebalium, Tree Violet, Alpine Starbush, and Alpine Hovea, although not in flower, contributed greens, rich red-browns, and silver-greys.

Along the track we met Dr Michael Nash, an ecologist who was returning from a few days' bush camping to study beetles. He leads a team from Melbourne and Latrobe Universities in a study of the effects of climate change on the alpine area. He commented on the presence of exotic species such as European Wasps and Honey Bees in the area. He explained that the huge numbers of Black Ants, *Iridomyrmex mjobergi*, that swarmed over our shoes whenever we stopped walking, giving us the occasional nip, have a very important role in keeping the alpine soil in good condition. While these are the most common ant in the area, a small brown Argentinian Ant, *Pheidole sp1*, the Jack Jumper ant, *Myrmecia pilosula* and a predatory ant, *Amblyopone australis*, also occur. Michael was pleased to accept Ken Harris' invitation to go 'mothing' that evening and Wendy didn't miss the opportunity to take Michael's contact details in the hope of arranging for him to speak to our club at a future meeting.

Our enthusiasm for searching for insects increased. The beetles recorded included a Darkling Beetle and an Orange Stack-hat Beetle. Marlene was fortunate in seeing an Antichinus as she returned to the car park ahead of the group. Birds included the Flame Robin, Richards Pippit, Brown Thornbill, Scrub Wren and, from the Bogong High Plains Road beside the dam, a Pied Cormorant, Great Cormorant, and Masked Lapwing. A stop during the short trip to the Watchbed Creek car park revealed a healthy mat of Mud Pratia, *Pratia surrepens*, flowering in the gutter.

After morning tea, we explored the Watchbed Creek Walk, a rocky vehicle track that provided views of the Rocky Valley dam below us and grassy slopes rising to a horizon lined with bare silver branches of Snow Gums far above us. Among many of the plants seen during our previous walks we noted an abundance of the Scaly Everlasting, *Ozothamnus sp1*, shrubs of Alpine Grevillea, *Grevillea australis*, several Mauve Leek-orchids, *Prasophyllum alpestre*, a few Alpine Leek-orchids, *Prasophyllum spacelatum*, and a few plants of Creamy Candles and Coral Heath.

The gutter beside the track provided easy access to plants typical of the spring–fed wetlands and bogs of the area. These included the Carpet Heath, *Pentachondra pumila*, with its tiny white bearded flowers, mosses, rushes and sedges. The mosses included *Sphagnum sp* and *Polytrichum sp* and among several rushes and sedges, Mountain Cord-rush, *Restio australis*, Southern Woodrush, *Luzula modesta*, Broad-leaf Flower-rush, *Carpha nivicola*, and Fen Sedge, *Carex gaudichaudiana*, were identified. Tadpoles were plentiful where there was open water.

Birds spotted in this area included the Brown Falcon and Nankeen Kestrel. A Stonefly created some interest as we gathered at the car park before travelling to the Wallace Hut car park for lunch.

Margaret Rowe

## REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 20.2.2012

**General Meetings & Excursions**

**Friday 23 March**: **AGM**. Wildlife of South Africa – David Mules, David Stickney & Ken Harris.

**Saturday 24 March**: Coolart Sanctuary and Homestead by bus. Pickups from Yinnar at 8am then Churchill 8.15, Morwell 8.30, Moe 8.50, Yarragon 9.05, Warragul 9.20. $10 charge would cover costs if 20 participants.

**Friday 27 April**: The Secret Life of the Powerful Owl – Fiona Hogan

**Saturday 28 April**: Evening spotlighting in Morwell NP. Meet 6pm at Kerry Rd picnic area for BBQ tea. Start excursion 7-7.30pm.

**Botany Group**: Saturday 31 March: Pea family identification at Careys', 332 Normanby Rd, Warragul. Contact: Wendy Savage ☎ 5634 2246

**Bird Group**: Tuesday 3 April: Brodribb Wetlands & Mathison Park. Meet by 9.30EST at Brodribb Rd. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

**Finance** – Balances: Club A/c $1218.85. Investment A/c $13,609.58

**Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business**

UHF CB radios – David Stickney has investigated options. Motion: That we purchase 4 for $370 from Dick Smith and a camera bag for storage. D Stickney/D Mules

MP3 recorder – have used it, plays easily on a computer using Windows Media Player.

LVFNC Web page – John Sunderland has obtained password and has made some changes. It now works with Firefox. Wendy has updated programs for 2012. Still need to change email addresses, and on Google still has 2011 written. SEANA is keen to have clubs put their newsletters on their websites. Will see if John is able to do this.

Plant and bird lists compiled on excursions to be made available to members – will supply lists on request and email or print out lists for people as required. Contact Ken Harris or Wendy for plant lists and Alix for bird lists.

Plant survey for a walking track along the Old Callignee Rd for 3km ending at the Callignee Hall was conducted in December and club is to be paid $500. Not received yet so will follow up with Latrobe City.

Friends of Traralgon South Flora and Fauna Reserve are working with Parks Victoria to develop a picnic area on the Callignee South Rd to entice recreational users into the Park and subsequently help in its conservation. They aim to have some environmental interpretation and have requested input into this from LVFNC. Meeting on 23 February – Ken Harris offered to attend.

Latrobe City is updating and formalising the terms of reference for the following bushland reserve Committees of Management: Crinigan Rd Bushland Reserve, Edward Hunter Heritage Bush Reserve and Ollerton Avenue Bushland Reserve. Club responded to draft, noting that assistance from a Latrobe City executive officer might be advisable given some of the responsibilities of the committees, eg OH&S and securing funding. Lorna will continue on Ollerton Ave and Ken Smith on Crinigan Rd. Ask at GM for a rep for Edward Hunter.

Murray-Darling Basin Plan – request from Environment Victoria to publicise the opportunity to have input into this plan. Club will not input but will table at GM.

AGM planning – positions vacant are: Secretary, Vice Presidents 2&3, and Publicity Officer. Nomination forms at GM.

Digital Photo Frame – David Stickney suggested we purchase one for showing photos at publicity events and at general meetings. Motion: That we purchase a digital photo frame for around $200. A Williams/D Mules

**Conservation Matters**

Nothing to report

## GUEST SPEAKER FOR APRIL

**Dr Fiona Hogan** is a molecular ecologist whose research interest is in biodiversity conservation. She takes a multi-disciplinary research approach which encompasses ecology, biology, spatial analysis and population genetics to obtain a comprehensive understanding of wildlife behaviour, interactions and systems. The focal species of her research have spanned a broad range of fauna including raptors, small and medium sized mammals, thresher sharks and fauna surveys including biodiversity hotspots locally and in the Philippines and Indonesia. Dr Hogan commenced her current position as lecturer in the School of Applied Sciences and Engineering at Monash University's Gippsland campus at the beginning of 2010.

*The following is a report on one of the talks*

*given at the January Members' Night. More to follow next month.*

## NEW ZEALAND BIRDS

David Stickney was in New Zealand in early December last year combining house painting with some bird watching. The places he visited were Tiritiri Matangi Island, Miranda, Mount Bruce and whale watching in Hauraki Gulf.

New Zealand has just over 300 species of birds which is not many. However what lacks in low numbers it makes up in their uniqueness. Like many islands there is a tendency towards flightless birds and these birds became vulnerable to extinction when predatory mammals are introduced as is the case for New Zealand.

The first bird picture shown was that of a Huia which is now an extinct bird. There have been 45 known bird extinctions in New Zealand and what is more worrying is that nine of those extinctions have occurred since 1900. The Huia appeared on the first New Zealand stamps in 1895 but the Huia became extinct in 1905.

The other interesting aspect of New Zealand is that it was probably the last large landmass to be colonised as recently as less than 1000 years ago by the Polynesians. In those days there were no land mammals (apart from 3 species of bats) on the islands and the niches which would have been occupied by mammals were taken up by birds. When the Polynesians arrived there were 11 species of moa (large flightless birds) which are now extinct.

There have however been some success stories. David showed a picture of a Takaho which is a large flightless swamphen which was thought to be extinct but was rediscovered in 1948 and populations of these birds have been re-established on some of the offshore islands and protective enclosures. New Zealand is now recognised as the world leader in conservation and has been successful in eradicating invasive introduced mammals (rats, rabbits and cats) from many of their offshore islands.

David showed slides of some seabirds. New Zealand is recognised as the most diverse and productive place for breeding pelagic birds. Also shown were some slides of some of the introduced birds and many of their endemic birds which have survived as a result of New Zealand's conservation measures.

## COOLART BUS TRIP SAT 23 MARCH

The bus will start from Yinnar at 8am, then Churchill Pub carpark at 8.15, Morwell opposite the Post Office at 8.30, Moe opposite the Railway Station at 8.50, Yarragon at 9.05 and Warragul at 9.20. Charge will be $10per head. Entry to the Sanctuary is free. Tour of the Mansion is an optional extra.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Friday 23 March is the club's AGM. Positions vacant are Secretary, Vice Presidents 1 & 2, and Publicity Officer.

## MEMBERSHIP SUBS FOR 2012-13

Subscriptions for the new financial year are now due (1 March). There has been no change from last year – full details and form are on the inside back cover.

## DAYLIGHT SAVING ENDS 1 APRIL